

## J's Hut (A Space Academy Story)

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Summary: Set in a time before the Voltron series, a bet leads to a date that goes horribly wrong... Reviews welcome

## J's Hut (A Space Academy Story)

> <meta name="Author"> J's Hut FORWARD by the author:

I'd like to think that this story can stand on its own, but it helps if you are at least passingly familiar with the Voltron series of the 80's, both the lions and the <br>vehicle version. Chronologically, this story takes place before those series, but >features characters from both shows, as well as some of my own creation. <p>

Comments & Criticism welcome.

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>Voltron <br>A Tale from the Space Academy

J's Hut  
> By Mea <p>

The Space Academy. This was a place where the best and the brightest

>of the Galaxy Alliance youth could learn, train, and study to one day become <br>future leaders in the universe. The students represented the best of

>the best, for many of the Academy graduates had gone on to become noted <br>explorers, pilots, generals, leaders, and so on.

> Which is not to say that any of them was even remotely perfect.  
<br> = = = = =

> "Move, I wanna see!" <br> "Hold on, hold on!"

> "Hurry up!" <br> "Can you see mine?"

> "Will you guys MOVE!" <br> "I'm afraid to look."

> "Come on, it can't be that bad." <br> The group of cadets crowded around the bulletin board trying to catch

>a glimpse of their mid-term test flight scores. Like any group of students <br>waiting for grades, they were a group filled with excitement, trepidations, <br>and impatience; the score sheet had barely had time to settle before the <br>masses crowded in.

> "Mira! I see yours!" <br> "What is it, Lisa? Tell me! Pleeeeease! I can't get near it!"

> "Looks like... Ninety-seven point forty-five!" <br> "Can you see his?"

> "I'm looking- Hey watch it!- I think I see it..." <br> "What is it?"

> "Hold on, let me get out first." <br> The straight-haired brunette carefully wove her way out of the crowd

>of people and rejoined her friend at the edge of the mob. <br> "So?" Mira asked eagerly, "what did he get?"

> "Aren't you even going to ask how I did?" Lisa asked in mock hurt tones. <br> "Sorry, I've been thinking about the bet. How did you do?"

> "Ninety-two point sixty-three." <br> "Hey that's good. I couldn't see for sure but it looked like there

>were a lot of seventies and eighties on there." <br> "There were. That second leg of the course got a lot of people."

> Mira frowned. "It did? I thought it was the best part." <br> Lisa laughed. Her friend Mira was one of the top pilots and

>definitely the fastest learner in their class (at least when it came to new <br>air and space craft). There were few to rival her skills with a ship. One

>of them was... <br> "Lance. He wasn't here. Think he knows his score already?" Mira

>asked her friend. <br> Lisa shrugged. " I don't know. They were just posted. Maybe he

>decided to wait." <br> Mira stopped and looked at her with eyebrow raised. "This is Lance

>we're talking about here. So, you saw his score; tell me what he got!" <br> "I don't know if I should..."

> "LISA! All right, fine. I guess I'll go back there myself and-" <br> "Ninety-seven..." Lisa began.

> Mira held her breath. <br> "...Point..."

> She crossed her fingers and winced. <br> "...Fifteen."

> "YES!! I WIN!!" <br> Both girls burst into giggling squeals.

> They stopped only when they noticed they were being stared at. They <br>looked up to see a familiar face looking at them with a raised eyebrow,

>which made them both start laughing again. <br> "Hi Sven," Mira managed to gasp out at last.

> "Hello," the dark-haired cadet answered cautiously. Part of him was <br>worried that he might be part of a joke the two were sharing.

"What's so

>funny?" <br> "Nothing," the two of them answered together, getting more giggles.

> "Oh-kay," he nodded, and took a small step backwards; there were some <br>things he just didn't want to know.

> "Sven, have you seen Lance?" said Lisa between giggles. <br> He thought a moment. "Does this have someting to do with a bet I

>heard about?" <br> Mira grinned. "Yup."

> "Lance bet that he'd get a higher score than her on the flight test," <br>Lisa supplied. "The loser takes the winner out to dinner."

> "Oh," said Sven. This was hardly surprising; Mira and Lance had a

<br>history of competing against each other since the day they had met at the  
>academy. They seemed to swing between dating and trying to outclass each <br>other.  
> "So, have you seen him?" <br> "No, I don't think...Vait, there he is. Over there."  
> They looked to where he was pointing; the crowd around the board had <br>thinned, leaving a few people milling around, and one person in a brown  
>leather jacket staring darkly at the posted results. <br> Slowly, he turned and looked at them.  
> Mira grinned her broadest and wiggled her fingers in a wave. <br> He grimaced.  
> "I think he's seen the scores," Sven remarked. "Maybe ve should go?" <br> "You're right," Lisa agreed. "Mira-"  
> "Don't worry, I'll tell you everything that happens." <br> "Promise?"  
> "As soon as I get back, Lisa, I'll give you every detail. Promise." <br> "Okay, see you in Trig."  
> After waving her goodbyes to her friends, Mira casually sauntered <br>over next to Lance. She could almost feel his annoyance, but after the arrogant  
>way he'd made the bet in the first place, she found it nice to see <br>his ego taken down a peg.  
> "Good score," she said. <br> He grunted a response.  
> "You know, I bet it was that third checkpoint that got you," she <br>continued, savoring the moment. "If you don't hit that  
\_just\_right\_ it can  
>completely throw you off for the next turn." <br> "youwin." he muttered.  
> "What was that? I don't believe I heard that quite right." <br> "You. Win," said Lance evenly, then his face broke into a smile.  
  
>"Didn't think I could say it, did you." <br> "I did wonder. Good flight though."  
> "Hm. Not good enough." <br> "Serves you right, Mr. 'I-know-this-course-better-than-my-own-sock-drawer'." The bet was your idea, so looks like you're going to have to live <br>with it."  
> "Okay, okay, okay. I said it. You won. Dinner's on me." <br> "So, when should I expect my newly-won dinner, hmm?" she smirked.  
> "How about Saturday. I'll pick you up at seven." <br> "Tomorrow? That's pretty quick. You have something in mind?"  
> "Oh, believe me," he said, smiling a devious smile, "I've got a GREAT <br>place in mind..."  
> = = = = = <br> "Lance, how did you find this place?"  
> "I got lucky." <br> "Define lucky."  
> The "place" Mira was referring to was a hole in the wall called <br>"J's Hut" several miles from the edge of the city. It was also the place  
>Lance had taken her for dinner. <br> A layer of greasy haze lay over the room like a thin blanket, coating  
>everything in a thin layer of grime. A few tables were set haphazardly <br>around the room set with chairs, many of which had makeshift repairs on  
>their legs and back. Towards the back, there was a faded, worn pool table <br>(classic, not 4D) and an even more worn dart board that hung on a wall  
>covered in gouges, not all of which came from darts. A burly bartender <br>(Mira assumed this must be "J") halfheartedly tended

the battered bar, and  
>behind him, an old chalkboard listed the menu, such as it was,  
barely <br>legible through layers of chalk leavings. It looked as if  
nothing in the  
>place had been cleaned since the First Galactic Expansion. That  
included <br>the clientele, two dozen or so customers that fit the  
atmosphere so well,  
>she wondered if they had found the place or had been built with it.  
Now she <br>understood why Lance had insisted on casual clothes; if  
they'd been  
>dressed nice, they wouldn't have had a prayer of blending in. Even  
though <br>the patrons seemed to be ignoring them anyway, she was  
sure the two  
>of them stuck out like a pair of sore thumbs. <br> "We agreed the  
loser takes the winner to dinner," Lance said smugly,  
>"We never said where." <br> She wanted to glare at him, but that  
would give him too much  
>satisfaction. Instead she pressed onward in the conversation. <br>  
"You never answered my question. HOW did you find this place?"  
> "Saw it once when I was going into the city. You know, I always  
<br>wondered what it was like in here."  
> "You just can't stand losing, can you." <br> He flashed a wide grin  
at her. "I learned from the best."  
> "Oh shut up." <br> "We can still leave if you want."  
> "No, I'm not letting you off that easy." It was true he wasn't the  
<br>only one who hated losing. "We'll eat here. And I'm going to have  
fun even  
>if it kills me." <br> "Better be careful, the food might."  
> She ignored his latest joke and peered at the chalky smears that  
made <br>up the menu. The writing was barely legible through the  
smudges, she had to  
>squint to make out each item. <br> "See anything you want?" Lance  
asked.  
> "Number two looks okay. If I'm reading it correctly." <br> "Sounds  
good. I'll order for us. I'll see if the pool table's free  
>too. Be right back." <br> He left her by the door and strode over to  
the bar. Half of her  
>wanted to just turn around and march out of there, but like she  
said, she <br>wasn't letting him off that easy, and that meant at  
least staying through  
>dinner. Instead of walking out the door, she made her way to the  
pool <br>table.  
> Lance was talking to the bartender; who he seemed to be getting  
<br>along with pretty well. After a moment, he turned and waved an  
"okay" about  
>the pool table, so at least they'd have something to do. Her pool  
game was <br>a little weak; she didn't get much time to practice at  
the academy, and  
>she'd never played before she got there, but like most of the  
pilots, it <br>seemed to come naturally, even though most of them  
could probably beat the  
>socks off of her. <br> Mira gazed at the double rack of pool cues.  
There were about a  
>dozen, most of them appeared to be in decent shape as she examined  
them <br>closely. Only one of them was obviously warped (and looked  
like it had  
>taken a few years of abuse anyway), so she started taking them down,  
one at <br>a time and checking them for straightness, until she found  
one she liked.  
>By then, Lance was coming back with a pair of small plastic baskets

with the <br>food inside.

> "Here you go, one number two," he said, setting it down on the pool  
<br>table. "Hope you're hungry."

> "Thanks," she said, and reluctantly picked up the sandwich from  
it's <br>nest of potato chips in the basket.

> "Let me get a cue, and we can get started. Say, loser buys the  
<br>winner the next dinner?"

> "Do I look that stupid? No, wait. Don't even think of <br>answering  
that."

> Lance smirked and went over to the rack. <br> She took a bite of  
the sandwich. Surprisingly, it was good; warmed

>just right with a hint of mustard (she liked mustard), and bread  
toasted <br>just enough to be crisp, but not break into crumbs when  
you bit it. Everything

>tasted fresh too; she'd half expected it to be older than the  
<br>academy, but she was obviously wrong.

> She briefly debated about telling him as she watched him decide on  
a <br>pool cue when she noticed something.

> It was odd; Lance barely looked at the cues until he came to one  
with <br>a double green stripe in the end, took it down, checked it  
over once, then

>returned to the table. <br> In the few times they had played before,  
he'd take each cue down,

>check it for straightness, and move on to the next until he found  
the one he <br>liked. This time, he knew exactly which one he wanted  
almost before he

>started looking, and the only way he could do that was if he'd been  
here <br>before, not just once, but many times. Enough times to know  
which pool cue

>he liked without trying them all. <br> She thoughtfully chewed on  
her sandwich. Why had he lied when he

>said he hadn't been here before? Was it he didn't want anyone to  
know he <br>frequented this place? It seemed silly... well, maybe not  
to him. She'd

>never claimed to understand him, so maybe, just maybe... <br> Maybe  
to him, this place, J's Hut was HIS place, his corner of the

>universe that no one else knew about where you could go to get as  
far away <br>from everything in life. But that would be silly, since  
he brought her

>here; it would stop it from being HIS place. <br> Wouldn't it?

> "You ready?" <br> She snapped back to the present. "Sorry, I wasn't  
paying attention."

> He motioned to the table. "Ready?" <br> "Sure. Go ahead, break."

> With a little appropriate flourish, he chalked up his cue, took  
aim, <br>and sent the white ball on a collision course with the small  
cluster of

>colored sphere. Technicolor numbered orbs careened across the green  
canvas, <br>eventually slowing to a halt, but not before a bright  
yellow one disappeared

>down one of the side holes. <br> Lance looked over the arrangement  
on the table and carefully took aim

>again." <br> "Five ball in the corner pocket."

> He launched the cue ball across the table, where it knocked into a  
<br>green-striped ball, sending it leisurely rolling across the table  
to nudge

>the precariously balanced five into the gaping pocket. <br> "Nice  
shot," Mira remarked.

> "Thanks." <br> The reply was a reflex, Lance was completely

engrossed in his next shot.

>There was something about pilots and pool, the former always seemed  
<br>to excel at the latter. Maybe it had to do with spacial geometry;  
the fact

>that you had to be aware of forces and vectors if you were to fly  
out there, <br>and some of those instincts carried over into the  
game. It was all vectors

>and paths and angles that wove into a simple game. <br> Lance's  
third shot sent the blue 2 across the table where it

>leisurely bumped off the edge of the side pocket. He gave a small  
snort of <br>disappointment, and stepped away from the table, which  
meant it was Mira's

>turn. <br> Mira surveyed the table from several angles; there was  
the 11, but it

>was so close to the edge, she'd probably scratch. Maybe the 13,  
though she'd <br>probably end up sinking his 4 in the process. The 15  
looked like the easiest

>shot, but even it wasn't great. <br> She leaned over the table, drew  
the cue back, and practice aimed once

>or twice. "15, side pocket." <br> "From there?"

> She didn't look up. "Got a better idea." <br> "Maybe. Try aiming  
for the 10, like this," he leaned over her to

>direct her shot. As he did, she could feel his breath brush her  
cheek, <br>sending an almost electric charge through her skin. If  
felt like the room's

>temperature had just jumped ten degrees with the closeness of his  
body. <br> "You know," she said in a low voice, "If I didn't know  
better, I'd

>think you were trying to distract me." <br> "Why would I do that?"  
he asked quietly.

> "I don't distract easily." She turned enough to look deep into his  
<br>brown eyes, eyes you could get lost in.

> "You didn't answer my question," murmured Lance. <br> "And you  
didn't answer mine," she said softly, drawing herself a

>little closer to him. <br> "It's just a game."

> "It's never just a game. Not with us." <br> "...I know."

> Their eyes closed, she could almost feel his kiss when... <br>  
"WA-HOO!"

> Mira jumped; they both did, and the world snapped rudely back into  
<br>focus.

> A pair of scruffy-looking men had come in, each obviously way past  
drunk, <br>and were swaggering their way up to the bar talking loudly  
about the car race

>they'd just come from. The rest of the patrons were ignoring them.

<br> "...and I don' care WHUT anyone says," the first drunk  
continued,

>"that Emmerson boy in number 27 is the MAN! Ain't no driver gonna  
beat him <br>THIS season! Where's th' BEER!" he added, pounding on  
the bar for emphasis.

> Lance and Mira looked at each other; the moment had not only been  
<br>killed, it was already six feet under.

> Mira quickly composed herself. "Off number 10, huh. Right.  
<br>Number 10."

> Focusing was hard, but the shot wasn't: cueball off the 10, 10 of  
the <br>15, 15 down the hole. Even so, she still had trouble  
centering herself

>completely, and missed her next shot. And it still felt warm inside.  
<br> She picked up her sandwich as she watched him get ready for the  
next

>shot; what was she thinking? They'd never been able to get along for

any <br>length of time, yet for some reason, whenever he was around, she couldn't

>think of anything else BUT him. This was crazy; he was completely wrong for <br>her, he never took anything seriously, he was always trying to play an

>angle, always had some snide remark... he was positively infuriating! But <br>sometimes, when it was just them, she'd see something, she couldn't put her

>finger on it, something...something... <br> Something big was standing beside her.

> She turned to find herself facing a gap-toothed grin belonging to one <br>of the two drunks.

> "Hey, beautiful," he slurred. "Howzabout a purdy little thing like <br>you joinin' us for a couple uh drinks."

> "Sorry," she replied, "I only date within my species," <br> "Tha's all right Hon, I don't even believe 'n God m'self," the grin

>widened, exposing gums that hadn't seen a toothbrush in years. <br> "That's too bad, guess you're going to have to have fun without me."

> "Aww, c'mon! Yur the purdiest little thing in here, why doncha come <br>celebrate wi' us?"

> "I can think of a lot of reasons..." <br> "...Like she's with me," Lance finished for her, putting his arm

>protectively around her shoulder. <br> Lance to the rescue, she thought, who'd believe it?

> "Yur with him?" the drunk asked. <br> Mira nodded.

> "Well, you gotcherself quite a catch there, boy!" he said, giving <br>Lance a hearty thump on the back that nearly knocked him over.

"Yessir,  
>quite a looker. GrrrRAARR!" he leered at Mira and licked his teeth.  
<br> At this, Mira rolled her eyes and took a bite of her dinner in

>disgust. <br> "Y'know, I wuz watchin' you play. Yuh seem purdy good at pool, boy,

>but how're yuh at darts?" <br> "Darts?"

> "Yeah, darts. Like whatcha play with that dartboard over there."

<br> Lance thought a second. "I've played once or twice. Why?"

> Mira nearly choked on her sandwich; once or twice? She'd seen Lance <br>play against Cliff at least once a week for the past cycle (Cliff won a lot,

>but the games were always close). Okay, technically it wasn't the same as <br>the board here since their board was electronic and this one obviously

>wasn't, but still... <br> "Good! Lessee how good yuh are. Loser buys a round to the house."

> There was WAAY too much betting involving food around here, Mira <br>thought, but decided to stay quiet.

> "Well, I don't know..." There was a hint of taunting in Lance's <br>voice, but it was lost on the behemoth.

> "What, yuh not MAN enough?" <br> "Well, since you put it that way, what's one game."

> Oh boy, thought Mira, this is going to be a slaughter. <br> "Great! Lemme get th' darts. Hey you! Where're th' darts? We wanna

>play!" <br> As the drunk stomped over to the bartender, Mira leaned in and

>whispered to Lance, "Isn't a bet how you got into this in the first place?" <br> "Come on, he's so drunk he can't even look straight."

> "True, but maybe, you should let him win," she added. <br> "Would

YOU let him win?" Lance whispered back.  
> "...No." <br> "And you think I would?"  
> "Just don't say I didn't warn you. I don't think he's a good loser." <br> "I bet he passes out before the game's over with," Lance smirked,  
> "Just watch." <br> "Like I have a choice," she muttered, settling against the pool table  
> and their unfinished game. <br> At this point, the drunk came back proudly bearing a set of darts  
> like an Olympic torch in one hand, and a beer bottle in the other. He took <br> Lance by the shoulder and half lead, half dragged him over to the dartboard.  
> He pointed down to a faded white line painted in the hardwood. <br> "Tha's the line yuh have t' stand behind t'play. I'll go first.

> Here're yur darts." <br> He thrust a handful of metal spikes in Lance's direction, which Lance  
> took carefully, trying not to stab himself. Satisfied, the drunk set his <br> beer on the nearest table and stepped up to the line.  
> "Watch this," he said, aimed a dart, and let it fly. <br> With a quiet "thok", the dart stuck in corkboard near the seventeen.  
> The next two stuck for eighteen and eleven. <br> "Not bad, huh?" the drunk grinned.  
> "Pretty good." <br> "Yur turn, boy. Beat that!"  
> Here it comes, Mira thought. <br> Lance aimed, squinted once, aimed again, and threw. And again. And  
> again. <br> "Let's see," Lance remarked smugly, "that's a twenty, another  
> twenty, and, looks like a bull's eye. That's good, right?" <br> He heard a bottle break against the floor beside him and turned in

> time to dodge the fist launched at his face. <br> "Hey! Take it easy!"  
> "Yur makin' fun uh me!" the drunk slurred, fury burning in his <br> already bloodshot eyes, "NOBODY duzzat t'ME!"  
> He swung again. Lance easily dodged it, but he could tell that there <br> was a crowd starting to gather to watch the two of them, finding this far  
> more exciting than their drinks. <br> Mira called to him. "I warned you!"  
> "I know!" he answered, blocking the next punch and quickly <br> counterpunching his attacker, much to the crowd's approval.  
> Mira shook her head and tried not to get shoved by the cheering (and <br> mostly drunk) crowd as they watched one of their fellow drunks stagger after  
> Lance. There was no question in her mind that he'd make short work out of <br> the drunk, academy training or not. Hopefully, this would be over quickly.  
> ...Except the drunk's friend was trying to sneak up behind Lance with <br> a pool cue.  
> So much for fair play. <br> She was behind him in two strides, and tapped him on the shoulder.  
> He turned. "Whut?" <br> "This was supposed to be a FAIR fight."

> Then she socked him across the jaw. <br> He fell into the crowd, which jeeringly shoved him back at her,  
> giving her another shot, and basically signaled a general free-for-all brawl <br> among the spectators as J's Hut exploded in chaos.  
> Glasses sailed across the room, smashing into walls (and



<br>occasionally, people) and rained sparkling shards of glass and showers of  
>liquor over the room. Chairs and stools quickly took on new lives as  
<br>kindling and splinters. And all around people threw themselves into the  
>brawl not caring who they hit. In no time, Lance and Mira found themselves <br>fighting back to back.  
> "You didn't plan this, did you?" Mira yelled over her shoulder.  
<br> "No!" he yelled back, "There hasn't... there hasn't been a fight here  
>in months!" <br> "Terrific."  
> "Incoming!" <br> A bottle breezed by her head. "Thanks."  
> "Thank me later." <br> "Right."  
> They had certain advantages over the rest of the rabble. <br> One: they were still sober.  
> Two: they were back to back, which meant no one was getting a cheap <br>shot on them from behind.  
> And three: they were probably the only ones there with any kind of <br>formal hand-to-hand training (though the other people likely had lots of  
>INformal hand-to- hand experience). <br> Which is why they were winning when the authorities finally showed up.  
> = = = = = <br> [Knock Knock]  
> "Just a moment!" <br> The door opened and the smiling face of Mira's roommate Ginger poked  
>around. <br> "Lisa! Hi!"  
> "Hi Ginger. I came to see Mira. Is she here?" <br> "Not yet."  
> Lisa frowned. "They're not back yet?" <br> "Nope. Hey, come in. I've got popcorn."  
> She reluctantly followed Ginger into the dorm room. Ginger was <br>obviously in for the evening, dressed in an oversized T-shirt that reached her  
>knees with a picture of a cat on it, and a pair of pink fuzzy slippers. She <br>took a large bowl of popcorn from the pinker side of the room and offered it  
>to Lisa. <br> "You're not worried?" asked Lisa, taking a handful.  
  
> "No, of course not. They're probably having a great time and lost <br>track. Don't they just make such a perfect couple?"  
> "A perfect couple of what," Lisa muttered under her breath. <br> "You don't think so?"  
> Lisa wanted to say Yes, that's exactly what I think. She decided <br>against it because part of her agreed with Ginger; when they were together  
>there was a kind of chemistry. Sometimes it was like nitro and glycerin, but <br>other times, there was a real magic there. If only they weren't so STUBBORN...  
> The phone rang. Ginger picked it up. <br> "Hello..? Oh hi! We were just talking about you... Sure, what's a  
>roommate for?... okay... She's right here if you want to tell-... You're <br>WHERE?!?... No, I-... But how did-... Okay.... How much?... Mira, I'm going  
>to have to tell Commander Pastors about this... He's going to find out <br>anyway... uh- huh... I know, but maybe he'll cover bail... Uh-huh... I  
>know... Okay, I'll tell them... Bye." <br> She slowly hung up the phone and looked at Lisa.  
> "I don't think their date went well." <br> = = = = =  
> "A barroom brawl," Commander Pastors' voice said coldly as he stared <br>down at the two cadets in his office who tried not to

squirm under his gaze.

> They weren't sure if he wanted an answer from them, or was he just  
<br>stating facts, his tone was somewhere in between.

> "A barroom BRAWL," he said again, this time changing emphasis. <br>  
"yessir," Lance and Mira mumbled together.

> The commander leaned back in his chair and looked them over. <br>  
"Frankly, I am appalled. Behavior like this is completely  
unacceptable

>to the Academy." He paused to look down at the reports on his desk.  
"And <br>this... I don't care which of you started it, and I don't  
care who just

>happened to be caught up in what happened; you obviously were both  
involved and <br>will have to face the consequences."

> Mira noticeable cringed at this; Lance merely looked nervous but  
hid <br>it better.

> "Besides this incident going on your permanent record, the two of  
you <br>will be spending the next two days in the stockade, and in  
the meantime, I

>want both of you to write a dissertation for me on conduct becoming  
a soldier. <br>I'll have the details sent to you. There will be  
someone to escort you to

>there when you leave my office. That is all. Dismissed. " <br> The  
two cadets snapped a salute, turned, and walked out of the office.

> Once in the hallway, Mira's body slouched in depression. "I can't  
<br>BELIEVE this is happening. And on my record too!"

> "Uh-huh," Lance grudgingly agreed. <br> "I'm never going to get a  
commission now! I can't... I mean, I can't..."

>oh this is awful. I am so dead." <br> "What did Pastors mean by  
'which one of us started it'?"

> Mira snapped out of her self-pity. "What?" <br> "I said, what did  
Pastors mean by 'which one of us started it'?"

> "I don't know. I thought it would be pretty obvious, especially  
after I <br>knocked that guy into the crowd."

> Lance stopped walking. "You said you started it?" <br> "Well...  
yeah. I guess I did. I mean, everybody were just watching

>until I did that. You were just defending yourself until then." <br>  
"Is that what you said?"

> "Well... kinda." She thought a moment. "Just out of curiosity, what  
<br>did YOU say?"

> He tried not to smile. "I said that the guy came after me, I  
punched <br>him, and then everything went crazy... and you were only  
defending yourself.

>I... did take you there in the first place." <br> Mira laughed. So  
did Lance.

> "No wonder he couldn't tell which of us started it. Any normal  
person <br>would be trying to blame the other guy. But not us." said  
Mira as they

>started walking again. <br> "Mira, I'm really sorry, it wasn't  
supposed to happen like that.

> "It's okay. I kind of figured Even you couldn't plan a disaster  
like <br>that."

> "Thanks, I think." <br> "Anyway, it wasn't THAT bad. The food was  
okay and I'm starting to get

>better at pool. I guess it was kind of fun." <br> "...Really?"

> "Yeah. Until the fight started. How's your head?" <br> He fingered  
the four stitches on his forehead. "If anyone needs

>someone to play Frankenstein, I'm set, but I'll live. How's your  
arm?" <br> "Better," she said, wiggling the fingers on her left hand,  
the same

>hand that was now wrapped in a soft brace. "It's only a sprain. Should heal <br>before we finish our sentence."  
> "Yeah. That." <br> "...I wouldn't mind going back sometime. If you don't mind."  
> [blink] "You liked it that much?" <br> "Yeah, it... it kind of grows on you."  
> "Like fungus?" <br> "Ha ha. I'm being serious you know. I like your place."  
> If he noticed that he referred to it as "his place", he didn't let on, <br>though a bit of a smile crept over the edge of his mouth.

> "Well, if you really want to go back, I guess we could try." <br> "Think they'll let us back in after what happened?"  
> "Oh, I think they won't mind," he said, and she knew he was certain. <br> They were quiet when they reached the door that lead outside to their  
>waiting escort to the stockade, almost feeling the impending doom outside. <br>The two of them hesitated, neither wanting to deal with their fate just yet,  
>but knowing there wasn't much choice. Finally, Lance took a deep breath and <br>opened the door.  
> The three guards looked at them stoically and quietly escorted the two <br>to the waiting transport.  
> Mira thought to herself during the ride: she had a sprained wrist, a <br>black mark on her permanent record, a dissertation to write, and two days in  
>the stockade, yet, for some reason, she felt good. Really, REALLY good. <br>Maybe she was crazy. Maybe it was shock that was keeping her from seeing some  
>aspect of the situation, or maybe... <br> She looked over at Lance, his eyes meeting hers, and decided that maybe  
>life was good, and she'd leave it at that. <br> She wondered if the stockade had cable.

FIN  
> <p>

End  
file.